

Introductory Remarks on S. 1515, The Higher Education for Freedom Act

Mr. President, today I am proud to introduce the Higher Education for Freedom Act. This bill will establish a competitive grant program making funds available to institutions of higher education, centers within such institutions, and associated nonprofit foundations to promote programs focused on the teaching and study of traditional American history and government, and the history and achievements of Western Civilization, at both the graduate and undergraduate level, including those that serve students enrolled in K-12 teacher education programs.

Today, more than ever, it is important to preserve and defend our common heritage of freedom and civilization, and to ensure that future generations of Americans understand the importance of traditional American history and the principles of free government on which this Nation was founded. This basic knowledge is not only essential to the full participation of our citizenry in America's civic life, but also to the continued success of the American experiment in self-government, binding together a diverse people into a single Nation with common purposes.

However, college students' lack of historical literacy is quite startling, and too few of today's colleges and universities are focused on the task of imparting this crucial knowledge to the next generation. One survey of students at America's top colleges reported that seniors could not identify Valley Forge, words from the Gettysburg Address, or even the basic principles of the U.S. Constitution. Given high-school level American history questions, 81% of the seniors would have received a D or F, the report found.

One college professor even informed me that her students did not know which side Lee was on during the Civil War, or whether the Russians were allies or enemies in World War II. A student of hers even asked why anyone should care what the Founding Fathers wrote.

Mr. President, Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "If a nation expects to be ignorant - and free - in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be." I believe the time has come for Congress to do something to promote the teaching of traditional American history at the postsecondary level, and I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.